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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 005924

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [CASC](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: FARC COMMENTS ON POTENTIAL HOSTAGE EXCHANGE,
INCLUDING 3 AMCITS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood
Reasons: 1.4(a), (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) In three recent media statements, the FARC has voiced its willingness to discuss with the GOC a humanitarian exchange of imprisoned guerillas for FARC-held hostages, among them three U.S. citizens. FARC spokesperson Raul Reyes also raised the prospect of broader peace talks, but contingent on weighty FARC demands -- demobilization of two entire departments, suspension of arrest warrants against guerilla leaders, and a cessation of COLMIL operations. End Summary.

New Interest; Familiar Venom

¶2. (C) In a June 22 interview with Venezuelan television channel Telesur, FARC spokesman Raul Reyes indicated that FARC leadership is amenable to negotiating a humanitarian agreement with the GOC, depending on GOC concessions. He claimed the onus was on President Uribe to decide between war and peace, but meanwhile he enumerated a heavy list of FARC prerequisites for talks.

¶3. (C) In a communique dated June 20 but posted on the internet June 26, the FARC's general staff affirmed: "Acknowledging the electoral results, in the face of national clamor, the FARC ratifies its proposals for prisoner exchange and political solutions to the social armed conflict." The letter's tone is far from conciliatory, however, referring to Uribe's politics as "contaminated....messianic, elitist, paramilitarized, and anti-patriotic." FARC leadership further questioned the legitimacy of Uribe's re-election based on an abstention rate the FARC put at 73 per cent.

¶4. (C) In a June 27 interview with the French daily L'Humanite, Reyes reiterated the FARC's interest in exchange and confirmed the good health of French-Colombian hostage Ingrid Betancourt. For the first time Reyes explicitly said the FARC would be willing to swap about 50 persons (including three U.S. citizens, Betancourt, security forces, and political leaders) for 500 guerillas. Reyes demanded that FARC members Simon Trinidad and Sonia, who have been extradited to the U.S., be included in the exchange.

FARC Demands

¶5. (C) As preconditions for humanitarian exchange, Reyes repeated the FARC's demand of demilitarization of two municipalities, Pradera and Florida, in Valle del Cauca. These are the same terms made in late 2005 GOC-FARC talks about a possible humanitarian exchange zone.

¶6. (C) For subsequent broader peace negotiations, Reyes' demands were far steeper: that the GOC demilitarize two entire departments, Caqueta and Putumayo, and suspend arrest warrants for FARC general staff. Reyes insisted on demilitarization, saying that talks could not begin until such zones are in place. He also asked for a freeze of all COLMIL 'Plan Patriota' operations nationwide and that President Uribe acknowledge the existence of an internal conflict in Colombia. Reyes further specified that FARC would not accept secret talks 'under the table,' nor would it allow reliance on intermediaries.

Comment

¶7. (C) There is much speculation about possible talks with the FARC, and some activity inside the government and among outside "facilitators." We will see. We don't want the government to lose an opportunity, but we don't want it to stretch too far, either.

WOOD